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DEPARTMENT of JUSTICE

Department of Justice

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Co-Leader of COVID-19 Loan Fraud Ring Extradited from Montenegro to Begin Serving Prison Sentence

A California woman who fled to Montenegro to avoid serving a lengthy prison sentence has been returned to the United States after spending approximately one year as a fugitive.

Tamara Dadyan, 43, of Encino, was extradited by Montenegro and arrived in Los Angeles Monday evening. She is expected to appear this afternoon in the U.S. District Court in Los Angeles.

According to court documents, Dadyan was a member of a Los Angeles-based fraud ring who engaged in a scheme to fraudulently obtain more than \$20 million in Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) COVID-19 relief funds. Dadyan and her co-conspirators used dozens of fake, stolen, or synthetic identities – including names belonging to elderly or deceased people and foreign exchange students who briefly visited the United States years ago and never returned – to submit fraudulent applications for approximately 150 PPP and EIDL loans.

In support of the fraudulent loan applications, Dadyan and her co-conspirators also submitted false and fictitious documents to lenders and the Small Business Administration (SBA), including fake identity documents, tax documents, and payroll records. Dadyan and her co-conspirators then used the fraudulently obtained funds as down payments on three luxury homes in California. They also used the funds to buy gold coins, diamonds, jewelry, luxury watches, designer handbags, cryptocurrency, securities, and a Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

In June 2021, Dadyan pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and bank fraud, one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering, and one count of aggravated identity theft. She was sentenced in December 2021 to 10 years and 10 months in prison.

In January 2022, Dadyan fled the United States. U.S. authorities determined Dadyan had fled to Montenegro where she joined Richard Ayvazyan and Marietta Terabelian, two other participants in the scheme and conspiracy who also fled after their convictions. Ayvazyan and Terabelian, who were respectively sentenced to 17 years and six years in prison, were extradited to the United States from Montenegro in November 2022.

Assistant Attorney General Kenneth A. Polite, Jr. of the Justice Department's Criminal Division; U.S. Attorney Martin Estrada for the Central District of California; Assistant Director Luis Quesada of the FBI's Criminal Investigative Division; Special Agent in Charge Tyler Hatcher of the IRS Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI) Los Angeles Field Office; Special Agent in Charge Weston King of the SBA Office of Inspector General (SBA-OIG), Western Region; and Special Agent in Charge Jay N. Johnson of the Federal Housing Finance Agency Office of Inspector General (FHFA-OIG), Western Region, made the announcement.

The Government of Montenegro, including the Ministry of Justice, provided significant assistance in the extradition of Dadyan to the United States. The Justice Department's Office of International Affairs also provided substantial assistance in securing the arrest and extradition of Dadyan.

The FBI Los Angeles Field Office, IRS-CI, SBA-OIG, and FHFA-OIG investigated the case. The U.S. Marshals Service transported Dadyan from Montenegro to the United States.

Trial Attorney Christopher Fenton of the Criminal Division's Fraud Section and Assistant U.S. Attorneys Brian Faerstein and Scott Paetty for the Central District of California are prosecuting the case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Dan Boyle for the Central District of California is handling forfeiture. Trial Attorney Goran Krnaich and International Affairs Specialist Marina Shimarova of the Justice Department's Office of International Affairs handled the extraditions with assistance from Assistant U.S. Attorney John Lulejian for the Central District of California.

The Fraud Section leads the Criminal Division's prosecution of fraud schemes that exploit the PPP. Since the inception of the CARES Act, the Fraud Section has prosecuted more than 200 defendants in more than 130 criminal cases and has seized over \$78 million in cash proceeds derived from fraudulently obtained PPP funds, as well as numerous real estate properties and luxury items purchased with such proceeds. More information can be found at <https://www.justice.gov/criminal-fraud/ppp-fraud>.

In May 2021, the Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. The Task Force bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud by augmenting and incorporating existing coordination mechanisms, identifying resources and techniques to uncover fraudulent actors and their schemes, and sharing and harnessing information and insights gained from prior enforcement efforts. For more information on the department's response to the pandemic, please visit <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus>.

Anyone with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving COVID-19 can report it by calling the Department of Justice's National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) Hotline via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.